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REVIEWS.

"MASSACHUSETTS ELECTION SERMONS."

MANY gleanings for the curious in our early history, much amusement for the humorously minded, and perhaps some edification for the serious may be gathered from Lindsay Swift's popular pamphlet with the above title, recently reprinted from the publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts. Election sermons began to be preached in Boston in 1661. They were continued with but thirteen breaks until 1884. From the first, or perhaps we should say especially at first, they were written in the devout belief that religion and law were closely connected. They undertook by exhortation and commination to influence elections and legislation, though seldom, it would seem, with much success even in the palmy days of the Puritan commonwealth. Rare it was to hear an *irenicon* like that preached in 1637 by Thomas Shepherd, "the gracious, sweet, heavenly-minded, and soul-ravishing minister," who, when John Wheelwright had been condemned for sedition because he preached "against all who walked in a covenant of works," muddled both parties, Winthrop tells us, "so as, except men of good understanding and such as knew the bottom of the tenets of those of the other party, few could see where the difference was." We learn, however, from the same authority that an auditor of this same Shepherd was once so "wounded in conscience" at his preaching that "he drowned himself in a little pit where was not above two-foot water."

The colonists of those days were a race of politicians, and Mather's ideal clergy, "a speaking aristocracy in the face of a silent democracy," remained a pious aspiration. Even as early as 1643 Ezechieel Rogers is accused of fostering "that democratical spirit which acts our deputies," and was apparently refused the usual "leave to print." Indeed, there was

then a very strict censorship of the New England press, for in 1669 the "Imitation of Christ" was refused an *imprimatur*, as the work of a "popish minister."

The unconscionable length of these "composures," as they are happily designated, is startling. One is not surprised to find Symmes described by Mather as a "painful minister" and "a sufferer for what he preached," when from another source we learn that he "continued in preaching and prayer about the space of four or five hours;" and he was by no means alone in the feat, being equaled at least by that Higginson of whom it is written:

Young to the pulpit he did get,
And seventy-two years in't did sweat.

The best of these early preachers was Stoughton, to whom we owe the proud words paraphrased by Longfellow in his "Courtship of Miles Standish:" "God sifted a whole nation that he might send a choice grain over into this wilderness." For the greater part, however, these sermons are as hard and rocky as the soil of the Berkshire hills. "'Tis Satan's policy," says Shepherd, "to plead for an indefinite and boundless toleration." Laud is to them "a bear," "a ravening wolf," and "a fox;" the Quakers, "a brood of the serpent;" and "such as escape the lime pit of pharisaical hypocrisy fall into the coal pit of Sadducean atheism and Epicureanism." As late as 1677 we read of "hideous clamors for liberty of conscience." If they had been heeded, perhaps the preacher of 1678 would have escaped imprisonment for libel. He had called Edmund Randolph a "wicked man."

Among the humors of the seventeenth century pulpit surely a place is due to Willard's "I am far from pleading for or justifying anything that looks like enthusiasm." There is something, too, delightfully naïve in Hubbard's plea for rotation in office, especially that of treasurers, "whose places, by reason of the profit they are usually attended with, are more liable to temptation and corruption." And this in 1676. However, the clergy of that day were by no means

proud of their flocks. A certain William Adams in 1685 describes his congregation as "low worms," not only "proud, haughty, high-minded, supercilious, self-exacting, arrogant," but also "sensual, intemperate, corrupt, fleshly, lascivious, covetous, unjust, oppressive," and even—O horror!—"company keepers" who "sit and spend time with vain persons." "That the great God should look upon such nothings is a great stoop." Cotton Mather is more philosophical. "Indeed," he says in 1700, "New England is not heaven. That we are sure of! But for my part I do not ask remove out of New England except for remove unto heaven." Even the gloomy Noyes in 1698 was constrained to admit that "it cannot with truth be asserted that as yet we are as bad as bad can be; for there is real danger of growing worse," and in 1705 the complacent Estabrook claims for New England as large a percentage of "real saints" as for any land in the world. Smug self-righteousness reached its climax, however, in 1715, when among the singular mercies of God to New England it is reckoned that "He swept away thousands of those savage Tawnies with a mortal plague to make room for better people." On the other hand, John Swift counts it among the "*horribilia de Deo*" that "some would induce us to believe that hell fire is shortly to be quenched," a thought most grievous to pious souls, for in 1736 we find Loring exhorting his brethren to "preach up the doctrine of hell torments."

These are a few gleanings from rich fields where we may find George III. compared to Nero and Harvard College described as consisting of "eight or ten young fellows sitting around smoking tobacco." There are portents of the A. P. A., and of Know-Nothingism, and a quite outrageous case of plagiarism to match those of the modern pulpit. But the most interesting personality that greets us is surely Samuel Sewall, that New England Pepys. He was not a preacher, but he had a wonderful faith in election sermons, and used to carry one or more in his pockets and read or present them to friends. He was, as Mr. Swift remarks, perhaps the only human being who ever thought of using an election sermon

as a philter to excite the tender emotions of love. The genial widower tells us in his diary that Mrs. Ruggles, the object of his famous unsuccessful suit, "made some difficulty to accept an election sermon lest it should be some obligation on her." But the appetite for them seems to have grown, for later she took, apparently without resistance, "Mr. Moody's election sermon, marbled, with her name writ in it." Unfortunately the sermons came but once a year. Mrs. Ruggles could hardly have resisted the frequent repetition of such blandishments.

NEW STUDIES IN ENGLISH LITERATURE.

A SHORT HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE. By George Saintsbury. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1898. \$1.50.

ENGLISH LITERATURE FROM THE BEGINNING TO THE NORMAN CONQUEST. By Stopford A. Brooke. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1898. \$1.50.

Of these two excellent books the former dismisses in thirty-seven pages what the latter treats in a volume. Moreover, admiring critics of Mr. Saintsbury, and the present writer counts himself of that company, must admit that these thirty-seven pages are decidedly the least satisfactory of the whole eight hundred that make up this brilliant and original survey of a subject that seems almost beyond the research of a single lifetime. It is natural, therefore, that we should speak first of Mr. Brooke's volume, which seems to range itself naturally in the series with Mr. Saintsbury's "Elizabethan" and "Nineteenth Century Literature" and Mr. Gosse's "Literature of the Eighteenth Century."

The title will suggest what the author avows: that the book, up to page 211, is a recasting and reduction by about two-thirds of the author's "History of Early English Literature" of 1892, which was noticed in the first volume of this REVIEW. The work has gained much by condensation and still more by the six intervening years of study. Its judgments are more independent, and often more judicious, especially in the attribution of authorship, and it has attained almost